

First Peek at a Stealthy Plane

For nearly ten years, the Stealth bomber has been a secret in name only. Despite a hidden budget and a classification higher than top secret, military analysts and aviation buffs have pieced together a remarkably detailed picture of the first nuclear bomber designed to be almost invisible to enemy radar. Last week the Air Force acknowledged the plane's flying-wing shape for the first time. The Pentagon issued a drawing of the so-called B-2 and announced that the bomber will make its maiden flight sometime this fall in a

30-mile run between Palmdale and Edwards Air Force Base in California.

The B-2's boomerang shape eliminates the thick fuselage and vertical tail section that reflect radar in conventional planes. Flaps, rudders, elevators and ailerons appear to have been replaced by computer-

controlled nozzles that guide the aircraft by directing the flow of the engine's exhaust. The engines themselves are nestled above the wings, shielding them from heat-seeking detectors on the ground. The outer skin and inner framework are cast in radar-absorbing carbon-epoxy composites. Other stealthy

features might include nonreflective paint and a refrigeration system to cool and dissipate telltale exhaust fumes.

Experts point out that the Air Force drawing may be somewhat misleading. Several details, like the placement of the engine-exhaust outlets, have been deliberately masked. Others, including crew size and maximum payload, along with such flight characteristics as range, air-speed and cruising altitude, remain strictly classified. The Air Force does acknowledge, however, that the plane is going to cost more than projected. The fleet of 132 bombers, originally priced at \$36.6 billion, could cost twice as much by the time it is airborne in the 1990s.



The Air Force's drawing confirmed that its secret B-2 is a flying wing